

Homelessness among displaced Ukrainians in the UK

Summary of research findings

This research on displaced Ukrainians and homelessness was commissioned by the British Red Cross and undertaken by Professor Glen Bramley, Heriot-Watt University. Please find further information on the background to the research, key findings and recommendations, and methodology below.

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1) Summary

Background

Following the escalation of the conflict in Ukraine in February 2022, the UK Government created the Ukraine visa schemes to enable forcibly displaced Ukrainians to seek protection in the UK safely and be hosted either by relatives via the Family Scheme or by other households willing to open up their homes via Homes for Ukraine. More than 192,000 people have arrived through the two main Ukraine visa schemes (as of 6 November).ⁱ More people received temporary protection under the two main Ukraine visa schemes in the first six months of their operation, than those who were granted protection under asylum and resettlement routes combined from 2016 to 2021.ⁱⁱ

However, while there is much to celebrate about the UK's response to displaced Ukrainians, the response has also highlighted some challenges related to integration. One example is the provision of safe, secure and affordable housing. As the conflict has continued, challenges have arisen in transitioning from original hosting arrangements to longer-term living, working and inclusion and participation in communities across the UK. As a result, many Ukrainians have spent extended periods in temporary or unsuitable accommodation and a growing number are experiencing homelessness.

This rapid research carried out for the British Red Cross by Professor Bramley at Heriot-Watt University explores housing and homelessness among displaced Ukrainians in the UK by pulling together a range of datasets on the extent, risks and drivers of homelessness among this group. It also uses an established methodⁱⁱⁱ to project future homelessness rates (please see more on the methodology below).

What we found

Displaced Ukrainians have been at greater risk of homelessness than the UK's general population

Displaced Ukrainians were more than four times more likely to present as homeless or at risk of homelessness than the general UK population after the first year of arrivals. Government data^{iv} shows that between April 2022 and March 2023 at least 5,500 Ukrainian households experienced statutory homelessness (i.e. made homelessness applications to local authorities) - a rate, relative to total household population, of approximately 4.4 times what is seen in the general population.

A late 2022 survey on destitution^v undertaken by Heriot-Watt found the number of Ukrainian households experiencing a different measure of homelessness, 'core homelessness' (which includes more extreme and immediate forms of homelessness, such as staying in emergency hostels, sofa surfing or rough sleeping), was around 4,250, which was also more than four times the rate for the overall UK population.^{vi}

Ukrainians are at risk of homelessness for a range of reasons

A range of factors underpin precarious living arrangements and the risk of homelessness for Ukrainians. Through our work helping close to 70,000 displaced Ukrainians in the UK^{vii}, we know that these can include relationship breakdown between hosts and guests and that the initial commitment required from hosts to offer accommodation for six months did not offer enough time for everyone to build language skills, secure a decent income and navigate the housing market.

In addition, the cost of living is impacting hosts' ability to extend placements, with 67 per cent of hosts reporting that the cost of living was affecting their ability to host in October 2023 and around two-thirds (64 per cent) of current hosts agreeing that the increase in 'thank you' payments (£500) encouraged them to host for longer. This makes it all the more important that government 'thank you' payments are continued into the third year.^{viii} These payments made to Homes for Ukraine hosts are set at £350 a month for the first year of sponsorship, and £500 a month for the second. However, funding has not been allocated for the third year.^{ix}

At the same time, many Ukrainians are experiencing barriers to accessing longer-term accommodation through the private rental market. These barriers include securing a rent deposit and guarantor, for example. Indeed, Ukrainians can be excluded from existing local authority schemes that tackle homelessness and help people with deposits and guarantors due to restrictive eligibility criteria and requirement to demonstrate local connection. We know that wider issues in the system can also affect refugees such as the freeze on the Local Housing Allowance^x (which enables recipients to rent privately) meaning that the allowance often does not cover even the cheapest 30th percentile of private rental rates in a given area.

This research commissioned by the British Red Cross also highlights the challenges Ukrainians have experienced securing decent work and that a significant number of the cohort have experienced destitution, both of which have implications for self-reliance and ability to rent independently (please see further information in explanatory data).

Homelessness among displaced Ukrainians is set to get worse

This new analysis shows that both statutory and core homelessness are set to have increased over the course of this financial year across the UK (excluding Northern Ireland where we have not been able to make projections due to there being less publicly available data on homelessness among this group). We expect a total of around 6,200 Ukrainian households to have experienced statutory homelessness between April 2023 and March 2024 (a rise of 13% from the previous financial year), and 4,900 households experiencing core homelessness (a rise of 15% from the previous financial year). (Note: there is likely to be some overlap between these two groups).^{xi}

This additional homelessness pressure comes at a time when homelessness is rising more widely in the UK and is particularly acute in London and the South-east where there has been a higher rate of arrivals under Homes for Ukraine^{xii} and affordable housing is already in scarcer supply. (Please also see Table 2 in the section on explanatory data).

Without more government support, Ukrainian refugees will likely continue to experience homelessness at these rates or worse

Homelessness among displaced Ukrainians is expected to remain at an elevated level for at least a further year up until March 2025, unless there is significant policy intervention or a considerable change in the situation in Ukraine. For example, if current ‘thank you’ payments to hosts are not extended into the third year of sponsorship and Local Housing Allowance levels are not increased in line with market rates, we are likely to see even greater levels of homelessness during this time period.

Our recommendations

The British Red Cross is calling on the UK Government to:

- Prevent more displaced Ukrainians becoming at risk of homelessness in the first place by:
 - Extending ‘thank you’ payments to hosts on Homes for Ukraine into the third year of sponsorship and introducing these payments to hosts on the Ukraine Family Scheme.
- Address barriers to accessing the private rental market and help alleviate growing pressures on local authorities, by:
 - Supporting local authorities to consistently provide guarantor and rent deposit schemes and ensure eligibility criteria do not prevent Ukrainians and other refugees from accessing them.
 - Increasing the Local Housing Allowance, which has been frozen since 2020, in line with market rates.
 - Extending the three-year visa currently provided to displaced Ukrainians and provide a route to long-term access to protection to make it easier to secure an income and to rent independently.
- Consult on and develop a sustainable plan for refugee accommodation that can form part of a wider strategy on refugee integration in the UK.

2) Methodology

This analysis has drawn on a range of sources including data from the Home Office, the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) and the Scottish Government on visas issued under the different schemes and statutory homelessness. It has also drawn on census data on background populations down to local authority level, surveys of Ukraine visa holders and hosts from the ONS conducted across several waves, and data from the Heriot-Watt Destitution Survey in the UK (Autumn 2022), funded by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

In projecting forward from the recent and current position we make use of an established homelessness projection system of models, which utilises a scenario-based approach to forecasting. The scenarios make assumptions about the policy environment and welfare system (e.g. extension of 'thank you' payments into the third year of sponsorship, which has not yet been confirmed, and reform of the Local Housing Allowance) and draw on various existing data sets (e.g. ONS data on household intentions, current living arrangements and labour market participation) to inform forecasting. This model was originally developed for Crisis and is periodically published in the Homelessness Monitor series and associated Technical Reports.^{xiii}

Data across the UK

Although the analysis seeks to build a picture across the UK, detailed data from the statutory homelessness systems in Scotland and Wales is currently more limited. In addition, devolved governments in these countries acted as super-sponsors and placed significant numbers initially in larger communal settings including hotels and cruise ships, which, while posing other challenges for the integration of Ukrainians, is likely to have prevented many from homelessness during those initial stages. There is also no publicly available data for Northern Ireland and so it is not included in this rapid research review.

For England specifically, DLUHC published monthly data on homelessness applicants, prevention and relief activity and temporary accommodation numbers (up to September 2023) which provides a fairly solid basis for the statutory numbers estimated in this sector over the first year and a half of the crisis (though not all local authorities report on their statutory homelessness figures every time).

Destitution Survey and the ONS

The Heriot-Watt Destitution Survey provides complementary data on a largely non-overlapping group of core homeless and others at risk of homelessness in 2022, based on users of crisis services, including evidence of destitution for some of this group evidenced by significant use of food banks.^{xiv} The ONS surveys provide a reasonably robust picture of the demographics of the refugee households, their stated intentions, their achievements so far (e.g. in obtaining work) but also the difficulties which they have encountered. Some complementary and confirmatory evidence was also collected by the ONS from surveys of sponsor households.

We have carried out analyses at local authority level across England looking at the relationship between visa numbers and existing populations of both Ukrainians and other near-neighbour

nationalities. We have also looked at other socio-economic and market factors, with similar analyses of the patterns of statutory homeless applications. These patterns and insights are combined with forward projections based on the well-established homelessness projection models used and reported in the Crisis Homelessness Monitor^{xv} series to predict rates of homelessness two years ahead at regional and national levels.

Finally, two alternative (favourable and unfavourable) scenarios have been constructed (as well as a central/baseline scenario for comparison), making different assumptions about the course of the conflict and UK Government policy decisions on key factors influencing this issue. By making assumptions about the policy environment and welfare system (e.g. an extension of ‘thank you’ payments and uprating of the Local Housing Allowance) and drawing on various existing data sets (e.g. ONS survey data on household intentions, current living arrangements and labour market participation) reasonable forecasts are made for the financial years 2023 and 2024.^{xvi}

Table 1. Key forecasting assumptions and how these vary across three scenarios in relation to homelessness pressures

| <i>Relevant Assumptions</i> | <i>Optimistic</i> | <i>Central</i> | <i>Pessimistic</i> |
|---|--|---|---|
| Conflict in Ukraine | Conflict de-escalates mid-2024 and Ukraine commences reconstruction | Conflict continues through 2024 with some resolution found in 2025 | Conflict continues beyond 2025 |
| UK Government decision on visas | Visa extension available but many do not seek extension | Visa extension available and large numbers apply | Visa extension unavailable but large numbers apply to other routes or remain anyway with unclear status |
| UK Government support for sponsors | Extension of ‘thank you’ payment into third year available although take-up low due to establishment in UK housing market or return to Ukraine | Extension of ‘thank you’ payment is only available in exceptional circumstances | No payment beyond two years of hosting |

| | | | |
|---|--|---|--|
| UK Government provides specific support for access to private renting for Ukrainian refugees | Government acts as guarantor and offers deposits and rent in advance via local authorities | Government encourages local authorities to offer discretionary support through homelessness prevention duty | No specific support or recognition of issue through homelessness funding or policy |
| UK Government support including funding to local authorities to aid homeless prevention for displaced Ukrainians | Government increases funding to local authorities for homelessness prevention with specific reference to Ukrainian refugee needs | Local authorities are permitted to use their discretion and existing funding to provide prevention support to Ukrainian group | No active encouragement of specific prevention activity for Ukrainian group |
| UK Government policy on Local Housing Allowance (LHA) uprating | Government increases LHA to 30 th percentile, indexes annually to Consumer Price Index, and reviews Broad Rental Market Area coverage | Government increases LHA in April 2025 but does not commit to annual indexing or review | LHA remains at autumn 2019 levels on existing areas indefinitely |
| UK Government policy on priority need in England | Government advises higher priority to social sector rehousing of some core homeless, with higher new provision of social housing | No change in formal priority rules ^{xvii} or social housing supply | No change in formal priority rules or social housing supply |
| UK Government provision of English language and childcare support | Increased provision of targeted English language support and access to childcare e.g. vouchers | Continued provision of some English language support | No additional or special provision |

| | | | |
|---|--|---|--|
| Refugee preference to return home versus staying in the UK | A clear majority of refugees seek an early return on de-escalation of the conflict | About half of refugees seek an early return on de-escalation of the conflict with others considering return later | A clear majority of refugees elect to remain in UK |
| Refugee success in UK job market | A clear majority of refugees obtain and sustain decent work in the UK | About half of refugees obtain/sustain decent work, with others experiencing unsuitable/inadequate work or not working | A minority of refugees obtain/sustain decent work, with others experiencing unsuitable/inadequate work or unemployment |

3) Further explanatory data

a) Regional homelessness pressures forecast

Table 2. Homeless applications from, and core homeless households among, Ukrainian refugees by region/country and financial year (estimated actual and projected under central scenario)

| <i>Region</i> | Homeless Applications | | | | Core Homeless | | | |
|---------------------------|------------------------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|----------------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| | 2022 | 2023 | 2024 | 2025 | 2022 | 2023 | 2024 | 2025 |
| <i>North East</i> | 183 | 210 | 226 | 157 | 157 | 182 | 175 | 98 |
| <i>Yorks & Humber</i> | 262 | 291 | 300 | 203 | 250 | 278 | 254 | 140 |
| <i>North West</i> | 321 | 342 | 363 | 232 | 307 | 346 | 315 | 170 |
| <i>East Midlands</i> | 331 | 367 | 350 | 229 | 256 | 284 | 253 | 137 |
| <i>West Midlands</i> | 475 | 542 | 515 | 333 | 531 | 593 | 530 | 284 |
| <i>South West</i> | 603 | 640 | 592 | 388 | 457 | 521 | 468 | 258 |
| <i>East England</i> | 417 | 455 | 440 | 286 | 332 | 392 | 360 | 200 |
| <i>South East</i> | 1,109 | 1,185 | 1,132 | 716 | 1,158 | 1,342 | 1,236 | 692 |
| <i>Greater London</i> | 1,460 | 1,710 | 1,883 | 1,191 | 1,934 | 2,400 | 2,332 | 1,341 |
| <i>England</i> | 5,160 | 5,736 | 5,800 | 3,735 | 3,449 | 3,939 | 3,590 | 1,978 |
| <i>Wales</i> | 120 | 149 | 129 | 83 | 167 | 172 | 160 | 84 |
| <i>Scotland</i> | 270 | 335 | 291 | 187 | 633 | 758 | 720 | 395 |
| Total UK | 5,550 | 6,220 | 6,220 | 4,006 | 4,250 | 4,869 | 4,470 | 2,458 |

b) Findings on access to the labour market and destitution

The vulnerability of Ukrainians experiencing homelessness or the risk of homelessness can be partly explained by challenges in the labour market and experience of destitution.

Labour market

Initial analysis of ONS survey data of Ukraine scheme visa holders^{xviii} demonstrates that:

- While some displaced Ukrainians have found decent work, others have experienced barriers to doing so. In second wave surveys 47 per cent cited barriers to employment with the following commonly cited: language (27-28 per cent), qualifications not recognised (16-17 per cent), not found suitable job (11-14 per cent), limited access to transport (11-12 per cent), working hours not suitable (7-11 per cent), unable to find child care (6-8 per cent), physical/mental health constraints (6-8 per cent), and jobs not paying enough (5-8 per cent).
- We find that 28 per cent of the cohort are estimated to be in a weak labour market position and likely to experience some unemployment or inability to work, while 57 per cent are in a relatively strong labour market position.
- However, even for those in the stronger position there are significant challenges around job quality and low pay, which affect many of those who are working and in that nominally stronger position.
- 30 per cent are not working in the same sector as previously, and probably even more are working at a lower skill level, because of the pressure to 'take any job' (11-15 per cent say they have felt this pressure), and limitations in English language skills (27-28 per cent).^{xix}

Destitution

- Research carried out in 2022 by Heriot-Watt as part of the Destitution Survey and funded by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation highlighted that many Ukrainians were experiencing destitution.^{xx}
- Two-thirds of Ukrainian respondents qualified as destitute and half of the Ukrainians using crisis services (that's 17,600, or 17.6 per cent of all of the sponsored cohort) used a foodbank during the week of the survey, indicating a high level of material and financial need.

4) Definitions

- **Local Housing Allowance:** Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rates are used to calculate Housing Benefit for tenants renting from private landlords. LHA rates are based on private market rents being paid by tenants in a Broad Rental Market Area (BRMA). This is the area within which a person might reasonably be expected to live. Please also see Shelter's website for more information on accessing the LHA: [Local housing allowance \(LHA\) for private renters](#).
- **Core homelessness:** comprising rough sleeping, staying in unconventional non-residential spaces, hostels/refuges/shelters, unsuitable temporary accommodation (B&B, nightly let with shared facilities, out of area placements), and sofa surfing (concealed family or single person units staying with other households, excluding nondependent children of main householder and students sharing, wanting or intending to move, and

overcrowded on the bedroom standard). Please see Crisis, [The Plan to End Homelessness](#), 2018.

- **Statutory homelessness:** Local authorities have a duty to secure a home for some groups of people, through the main homelessness duty. Every year, tens of thousands of people apply to their local authority for assistance with homelessness. To be legally defined as homeless you must either lack a secure place in which you are entitled to live or reasonably be able to stay, or be at risk of losing this within 56 days. Since 2017 all such households are entitled to assistance termed 'Prevention' and/or 'Relief', typically entailing advice and assistance on how to maintain existing accommodation, find alternative accommodation, and access it (e.g. through certain financial assistance). However, in order to receive assistance under the 'main homelessness duty' (in England and Wales), there are further strict criteria that you have to meet. Local authorities may initially provide temporary accommodation to households who might meet these criteria, mainly families with children, while ultimately aiming to rehouse them permanently. In Scotland, all households including single adults and non-family households are entitled to this 'main duty', entailing access to temporary accommodation and potentially permanent rehousing, primarily in social renting. Please see Crisis, [Types of Homelessness](#), for more information.

5) Endnotes and further sources

ⁱ UK Government, [Transparency Data: Ukraine Family Scheme, Ukraine Sponsorship Scheme, Ukraine Extension Scheme visa data](#). For FY 2022, we estimated 100,000 households. This is derived from the Migration Observatory estimate of population and inferred household composition structure. Please see: Migration Observatory, [Ukrainian migration to the UK](#), 2023.

ⁱⁱ 115,000 arrivals. University of Oxford, Migration Observatory, [Q&A: The UK and the Ukraine refugee situation](#), August 2022.

ⁱⁱⁱ Please find a description of the model in the peer reviewed Bramley, G. and Watkins, D., [Housebuilding, demographic change and affordability as outcomes of local planning decisions: Exploring interactions using a sub-regional model of housing markets in England](#), Progress in Planning, 2016. Please note that the model has continued to evolve to the version currently in use for projecting homelessness.

^{iv} Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, [Homelessness management information - Ukrainian nationals: England](#), February 2022 to September 2023 and Scottish Government, [Homelessness in Scotland](#), 2022 – 2023.

^v This refers to the Heriot-Watt Destitution Survey, funded by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation. Please see: Please see: Bramley, G. & Fitzpatrick, S. [Destitution in the UK 2023: Technical Report](#), 2023 and Bramley, G, Fitzpatrick, S., Treanor, M., Blenkinsopp, J., McIntyre, J., Johnsen, S., and McMordie, L., [Destitution in the UK 2023](#), 2023.

^{vi} Ibid.

^{vii} Since February 2022, the British Red Cross has helped over 68,000 Ukrainians through casework and offering emergency assistance.

^{viii} Office for National Statistics (ONS), [Experiences of Homes for Ukraine scheme sponsors, UK: 10 to 21 August 2023](#), October 2023.

^{ix} The 'thank you' payment is available for a maximum of up to 2 years after the guest arrives. This is intended to support existing hosts, and to help new hosts to offer support to Ukrainians in the UK who may need a new place to stay, and to give guests who may need it more time to get ready to move into independent accommodation. Please see: Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, [Paying sponsors: Homes for Ukraine](#), 2023.

^x Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rates are used to calculate Housing Benefit for tenants renting from private landlords. LHA rates are based on private market rents being paid by tenants in a Broad Rental Market Area (BRMA). This is the area within which a person might reasonably be expected to live. Please see: Valuation Office Agency, [Local Housing Allowance](#), 2023 and the Institute for Fiscal Studies, [Housing benefits have been frozen while rents have sky-rocketed. Only 1 in 20 private rental properties on Zoopla can be covered by housing benefit](#), 2023.

^{xi} It should be noted that core homelessness overlaps to some extent with statutory homelessness; whereas in mid 2022 (FY) evidence from Heriot-Watt's Destitution Survey (funded by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation) suggested limited overlap of core and statutory homelessness, we would expect this overlap to grow, as more people enter the statutory system, but not necessarily to a level above c. 40% of the total. Please see: Bramley, G. & Fitzpatrick, S. [Destitution in the UK 2023: Technical Report](#), 2023 and Bramley, G, Fitzpatrick, S., Treanor, M., Blenkinsopp, J., McIntyre, J., Johnsen, S., and McMordie, L., [Destitution in the UK 2023](#), 2023.

^{xii} Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, [Homelessness management information - Ukrainian nationals: England](#), February 2022 to September 2023.

^{xiii} Fitzpatrick, S., Bramley, G., McMordie, L., Pawson, H, Watts, B., & Young, G. [The Homelessness Monitor England 2023](#), 2023.

^{xiv} Bramley, G. & Fitzpatrick, S. [Destitution in the UK 2023: Technical Report](#), 2023

^{xv} Fitzpatrick, S., Bramley, G., McMordie, L., Pawson, H., Watts, B., & Young, G. [The Homelessness Monitor England 2023](#), 2023.

^{xvi} Please note that in this initial summary of findings we have focused on forecasts under the central scenario. The British Red Cross plans to publish further findings and detail on the research in the coming months.

^{xvii} Please see Shelter's webpage, [What is priority need?](#) for more information on who is eligible.

^{xviii} Please see the following surveys: Office of National Statistics (ONS), [Visa holders entering the UK under the Ukraine Humanitarian Schemes : 27 April to 15 May 2023](#), July 2023; Office of National Statistics (ONS), [Visa holders entering the UK under the Ukraine Humanitarian Schemes – Follow-up survey : 17 October to 7 November 2022](#), November 2023; Office of National Statistics (ONS), [Visa holders entering the UK under the Ukraine Humanitarian Schemes – Follow-up survey: 20 July to 4 August 2022](#), August 2022; Office of National Statistics (ONS), [Visa holders entering the UK under the Ukraine Humanitarian Schemes : 16 to 24 June 2022](#), July 2022; Office of National Statistics (ONS), [Visa holders entering the UK under the Ukraine Humanitarian Schemes : 20 to 27 April 2022](#), May 2022.

^{xix} These figures come from ONS's Ukraine Visa Holders Surveys. By looking at answers across five waves of the survey (between April 2022 and April/May 2023) we are able to report the range across different surveys. For example, in July 2022 survey, 11% of people reported feeling this pressure, and in the October 2022 survey, 15% of people reported feeling this pressure.

^{xx} The Heriot-Watt Destitution Survey took place in Autumn 2022. It covers a structured sample of users of 111 'crisis services' in 18 case-study areas across the UK, aiming to quantify and profile destitution being experienced in the last month by households (and other adults) at that time. Crisis services including advice (e.g. CABs), food banks, hot food (e.g. soup runs), homeless services (drop-ins, shelters, hostels, refuges, support services for complex need), migrant-oriented service, and Local Authority Welfare Assistance Funds (LWFs). About two-thirds of respondents are destitute (based on 'consensus' definition established with the Joseph Rowntree Foundation in 2015). Results can be grossed up to national numbers on either a spot/weekly basis or on an annual basis (i.e. people using such services over a year, whether once, occasionally or frequently).

Further sources

- Bramley, G. & Wood, J., Routledge, 'The Economics of Homelessness', in Gibb, K. & Leishman, C., (eds) *Handbook of Housing Economics 2023* (forthcoming).
- Bramley, G., Heriot-Watt University, [Homelessness Monitor Research Programme: Technical Report on Updated Baseline Estimates and Scenario Projections for England 2023](#), 2023.
- Bramley, G. and Fitzpatrick, S., Housing Studies, [Homelessness in the UK: who is most at risk?](#), 2017.
- British Red Cross, [Fearing, Fleeing, Facing the Future: How people from Ukraine are finding safety in the UK](#), 2023.
- British Red Cross, [Ukrainians in Wales still in need of housing and support](#), 2023.
- National Audit Office, [Investigation into the Homes for Ukraine scheme](#), 2023.
- The Resolution Foundation, [The Living Standards Outlook 2023](#), 2023.
- Watts-Cobbe et al., Crisis, *The Homeless Monitor Scotland*, 2023 (forthcoming).
- Welsh Government, [Homes for Ukraine: framework for accommodation. Guidance on what local authorities need to consider when rehousing people from Ukraine](#), 2023.